Gooding

SPRUCE GUM AND SUNFLOWER SEEDS

Some weeks ago, Bill Woo, proprietor of the local cafe, put 140 packets of toasted sunflower seeds in his glass candy case. Small fellows who still had faith that some day gum drops, suckers and chocolates would appear again were a little confused and puzzled. Bill, with an eye to business, soon had them initiated into the art of cracking sunflower seeds While they stood on the sidewalk, extracting the nutty kernels no bigger than a kernel of wheat, folks passing by grew curious and then the rush was on. The main street was soon littered like the bottom of a parrot's cage after Polly had been on a seed-cracking spree.

The following morning, even before the wind had cleared the seek husks from the sidewalk, three small fellows with a hang-over rubbed their noses on the glass case that now contained only the usual assortment, cough drops, soda biscuits and pipe cleaners. They had pooled their pennies but still lacked a cent of having enough to purchase a package of licorice and linseed waters. I loaned them a cent, remonstrating with them for eating so many medicated candies. I was a trifle embarrassed as they offered me one and I didn't like to refuse.

When the quota of candy and gum arrived at the local shops, one would think that the Kentucky Derby was about to be run, the way the hot tips fly around, and if you don't run like Sea Biscuit, you arrive just in time to hear Willie Woo say "Sorry, all sold out, too bad -- sorry," with that never failing Oriental smile.

Just where people got the idea that they had to have something to chew between meals or where all this chewing business started I can't say because they have been doing it as long has I can remember. Gum and candy manufacturers have capitalized on the demand for sweets and

garnered millions. It may have all started from that contented look on the face of cud-chewing animals.

Old timers from the East and the West tell of gathering tamarack and spruce gum some of them admit to chewing wheat, candle wax and shoemakers wax or beeswax. Sen-sens were popular on dance nights and if they were unavailable, cinnamon bark from the spice box or a few cloves gave th breath an interesting spicy tang. One old fellow told me he always put a pinch of tamara spice on his tongue to keep the girls guessing. They never could figure out just what it was, but they kept on trying. One can imagine that a pinch of tarara spice (that is a mixture of cinnamon, cloves, coriander, aniseed and fennel seed) would keep them guessing, especially if he had had a wee drop.

Whenever mother sent me to the trading store to exchange eggs for groceries in the days gone by she always said "You may have the odd cents." We purchased pink popcorn with tin whistles and blew them lustily until mother threatened to mount old Bluebell and ride over the Rockies and never return.

There were huge peppermint sticks striped like a barber's polw and strong enough to make your eyes water, sticks of horehound, bitter but long lasting, small heart-shaped cakes of sweet paraffin wax in pink or white, and little bundles of licorice wood like minature fence pickets done up in packsts that cost us one egg for each bundle.

Hank was always between the devil and the deep blue sea when he had two odd cents, for he couldn't make up his mind whether to purchase a plug of licorice with the red enamelled tin head of an Indian attached to the top, or a glass of apple cider of

equal value. Mr. Duffy swore the cider was as weak as vinegar but Hank said it sort of chirped him up, and I noticed when the Indians drank a lot of it they raced their horses up and down the street and argued a lot with Mr. Duffy over the price of the skins.

For one egg we could buy two chocolates, shaped like an Eskimo's igloo, only a little morepointed, with a nice soapy flavor from being in too close proximity to the laundry soap and one jaw breaker with a caramon seed in the centre. We never had too many of any of these thing because eggs and odd cents were scarce. Perhaps that is why I have remembered them so long.

When father went to the tall timbers for the winter's supply of wood, we accompanied him, carrying little bags with a draw string made from the scraps of striped bed ticking left over when new ticks were made, far more concerned with getting our winter's supply of spruce gum than we were with the winter's wood supply

Spruce gum took a lot of chewing and became more elastic after a few days of constant chewing and easier to handle. If the least bit of food got mixed with it, it crumbled and had to be discarded it was balky as the motor of a car on a cold morning and equally as hard to handle when it was kept in too warm a place, permitting it to get sticky.

We chewed it up and formed it into neat little rolls and carried it in little gin kidney pill tins we got from Old Sam who had a crick in his back and saved the empty tins for us. We drove a shingle nail right through the box and the closed lid, threaded them with a narrow ribbon, and wore them around our necks like a locket, well concealed by the ruffles around the neck of our

pinafores. We did this because our teacher made us burn it if he caught us with it. He said no nice girl chewed gum.

Mountains of gum have been chewed and discarded since then, and it is no longer a question of morals, but rather one of tasts, and I will admitt that it has lost its appeal and flavor for me. I wouldn't be at all surprised to hear most any day now that Willie Woo has a supply of plastic chewing gum on hand. My hot tip for today was on dainty dried bananas from south of the border down Mexico way. I'm still puzzled over the flavor like the girls were over the old-timer's pinch of tamara.

Gooding

THEIR LANGUAGE DIFFERED BUT THEY UNDERSTOOD each other

If the learned professor who is about to compile a dictionary in which the language of signs is to be dignified, had been watching the performance when my mother was carrying on a conversation with the red women, he would likely have found many pointers for his book.

These ladies, whom father called the lilies of the field, camped in the forest reserve each spring as soon as the trails were open, and visited us quite frequently when their lords and masters were hunting and fishing.

My mother couldn't understand the Indian dialect, and they couldn't speak a word of English, but they seemed to make one another understand; and if at times there were misunderstandings, it usually turned out to be humorous, and not serious enough to start any trouble.

Mother had been warned not to be too friendly with them if she didn't want to be pestered; but she, like many other settlers' wives, was lonely at times, and the red women were welcome visitors. She was fascinated by their bright colored blankets, beaded buckskins, fat brown papooses, and stolid faces that were as smooth and placid as the surface of a lake.

Even though they conversed by gesture instead of the spoken word they got to know one another very well, and my mother found that the red women had much in common with the white women.

Old Lady Eaglefeathers, whose age one could only guess at, was one of our most frequent callers; and she dominated the other women and scolded them roundly whenever she felt like it. Sometimes she

couldn't make my mother understand, and she would act out what she wished to convey, waving her arms excitedly.

Then if the idea failed to get across, she would grunt and rest herself on the back steps, where she chewed and spat tovacco so viciously one would think that rifle bullets were flying into the dust. Then she would repeat the performance until she was sure the white woman understood.

She brought her son's wife, a shy dark-skinned girl who never spoke, no matter how much the old lady scolded her. She just stood and stared out across the mountains toward the Sherburne peaks. She had a small son with a club foot who peeked out at us shyly from the folds of his mother's turkey red skirts. The old lady told my mother that the girl was as lazy as old Jezebel, our cow lying down in the pasture chewing her cud, and that she couldn't boil a duck or make skins soft enough to sew or do good beadwork.

One day the girl came across the hills on foot carrying the little crippled fellow; and her usually stolid face was stirred by conflicting emotions of anger and grief. We knew that she was terribly upset and her feelings were as deep and turbulent as the waters that ran over Cameron Falls. She sar on the floor and rocked her body back and forth, making strange sounds between her teeth; and we didn't need any dictionary to interpret it as "Oh woe is me, Oh woe is me."

Then the story was told.. Young Eaglefeathers had sold her pony and travois to the white man, leaving her afoot, because she had threatened to go back to her people across the Divide. She had met him when her people were hunting and fishing near the Shervurne lakes, and

her father had given her a pony and travois as a wedding gift when she married him.

She went across the hills and we never saw her again. When Old Lady Eaglefeathers came again in the spring we demanded to know where the girl was, looking at her very sternly and refusing her a cup of tea until she told us. She stood with her claw-like hands upraised and spat hard toward the mountains as she pointed in that direction. We understood that gesture also. Without any spoken word she meant, "She is gone and good riddance."

She told us Young Eaglefeathers had another wife now, and she could cook a duck and tan skins beautifully, and the new papoose had two good feet. But somehow or other the old lady knew that she had lost our respect; and that wasn't written in the book either.

The Indian scout told us he had taken the girl across the Divide where her father met her; and that it had taken quite a bit of diplomacy on his part to keep him from coming after Young Eaglefeathers for selling the pony, for less important things than that have started the red man on the warpath in the days gone by.

Gooding

TUBBY'S FAITH WAS ON THE DECLINE

We have been taught to be self reliant and to settle our differences among ourselves without carrying every petty annouance to the head of the household, who had enough of worries and cares. The result was that I was often called upon to act as judge and jury for five small fellows who had implicit faith in my judgment and accepted my decision with out a murmur. It was very seldom that we had to appeal a case to a higher court.

Sometimes I needed the wisdom of Solomon in dealing with their problems and if my judgments were not always in line with British justice and fair-play, then this could be attributed to my youth and inexperience and the brilliant defence offered by the accused when brought before the bar.

I think I was more lenient with Alfie than any other of them for he seemed to be able to wriggle through every knot hole of the law we had laid down for ourselves to abide by.

But this time it was Hank I had to deal with, and he was getting just a little beyond the jurisdiction of my court. It was a hot day in July and the potato blossoms were in full bloom. I sat reluctantly unravelling the feet of old socks so they could be refooted, wishing every moment that I could be out of doors. When the opportunity presented itself, it was a little different than I had expected.

Alfi came and stood beside me and whispered as he wiped his tear-stained face on the back of his fist, "Come Quick, Tubby is awful sick in the hayloft."

I ran for the baking soda, thinking he had been eating too many raw turnips; but Alfi said, "It isn't the cramps, it's his faith. Tubby's

lost his faith."

Well this was a fine predicament for Tubby to be in, for if there was one thing a homesteader needed it was faith, and lots of it.

Anfi said it was all Hank's fault that Tubby's faith had dwindled, that Hank didn't believe in a single thing. I headed for the barn with Alfi close at hand. Old Beulah, our brindle cow, hoisted over grudgingly when we climbed onto the manger and from there up the ladder to the loft above; and I could hear Tubby's sobs, now dying down like a storm that had nearly spent its strength.

Tubby was lying face down on the hay, his big wad of spruce gum lying beside him completely forgotten; and he had taken weeks to collect that chew from the last load of wood. He only answered with moans and groans at first, and I knew it must be something serious to make him grieve like this, as he was usually such a cheerful person. Finally he explained. He had just wanted to borrow Hank's new nippers so he could make a charm out of a pair of rooster spurs he had saved. He was going to wire them to his jack-knife chain to wear as a charm so he would be strong like John L. Sullivan. And Hank had refused. In fact he had said that he didn't believe in rooster spur charms.

Tubby poured out his troubles in an endless stream of words. His resentment at Hank's refusal was fanned to a flame when he and Alfie were catching lady bugs and chanting "Lady Bug, Lady Bug fly away home, your house is on fire and your children all burned," and Hank said they were nit wits, that Lady Bugs lived on the potato vines and they had no homes. Hank thought they should be helping with the weeding.

Tubby went on, "Just then a bigblue darning needle flew onto a vine close by and I told Hank I hoped it would fly over and sew his mouth up tight, and he laughed at me and said they couldn't sew up his mouth because

they didn't have any thread."

Tubby snivelled a little and then continued, "Hank says it's silly to stamp your hand and make a wish whenever you see a white horse, and wishing on double rainbows don't bring you luck either. And he says snakes don't wriggle until sundown after they are dead, and they don't swallow their young when they are scared. He says my horsehair I keep in the jar of fresh water will never turn out to be a snake in a hundred years."

It was wicked of Hank to cause Tubby's faith to dwindle like this. He had even told him he didn't believe the Lord made the earth in seven days, because the earth was such a lot of dirt and it had taken him and Ches Dusnip nearly a month to dig up an Indian grave when they were hunting for relics. Tubby believed in miracles and he kept his Sunday school cards tacked around the wall at the head of his bed.

Hank had gone a little too far this time and he would have to answer for what he had done.

I found him sitting on the edge of the raft sailing his pirate ship which he had just fitted out with sails made out of mother's old black silk umbrella, using the ribs for rigging. He looked up without a trace of guile in his blue eyes, and he didn't look much like a bold unbeliever; but it was my duty to accuse him.

He laughed at me when I told him how sick Tubby was spiritually, and said, "Tubby believes there is a fairy under every leaf." I said, "Well, let him believe it, Hank. Can't you remember when we believed in wishing wells, and we threw our pennies down the well in the pasture and I wished for red mitts and you wished for plush earlaps; and we got them, didn't we? You used to pick pins up every time you saw

them to bring you good luck."

Hank never blinked an eyelash as he said, "I wish I had a magnet that would raise copper out of water and I would get those coppers back again." There wasn't a sign of repentance.

That evening we all turned our faces away when Hank spoke to us to show him our displeasure, but the following morning Tubby's face was all smiles again. His lamp of faith had been lighted.

He stood holding the fruit har that had contained the horse hair, his face fairly beaming. The horse hair was gone and in its place was a small water snake darting about.

A miracle had taken place and what did it matter how it had been wrought. Hank had made restitution and Tubby's dwindling faith had been restored once more.

Gooding

UNCLE ALBERT AND HIS APPENDIX

About 1912 there was an epidemic of appendicitis in the community in which I lived. Whether the operations were all necessary, I am not prepared to say, however, I do know that it was quite the thing to have your appendix out and then discuss your operation with friends and relatives. We had a number of relatives who lived out of town, and they came to stay with us one by one after having their appendix removed. They always occupied the spare bedroom.

Uncle Albert was the one who held down the spare bedroom longer than anyone. He was a portly bachelor who was never very fond of working, and who really enjoyed being an invalid. He arrived from the hospital in a taxi, with my parents supporting him on either side, and after much struggling they finally got him into the spare bedroom. We had just got him nicely settled in to bed when he caused quite a commotion by shouting at the top of his lungs, 'Stop him! Stop him!" We discovered that the reason for all this was that the taxi driver had gone away with the glass jar of alcohol which contained Uncle Albert's appendix.

My father finally got it safely home, and it was placed on a dressing table near the bed. We were permitted to go in and look at it whenever we chose to do so.

We took our friends to visit Uncle Albert and see the appendix. We would hear him tell how he felt when he was going under the ether, "just like falling down an elevator shaft," and then he came out, there it was it a little glass jar, etc.

It was six weeks before we could get Uncle Albert to leave his bedroom and

then he stooped and leaned heavily on my father's knob-headed cane, pressing his side with his hand as if he was in terrible pain all the time. It took months for him to recuperate and the neighbor kids kept yelling at us over the fence, "How's your Uncle Albert's appendix?" Just as we were getting used to him as a permanent occupant of the guest room, he decided to leave for home. I can still see him limping along to the station, leaning heavily on the cane (which my father presented to him), with the precious jar wrapped up carefully under his arm.

We saw him on the train, placed the jar on the red plush cushions opposite him, and bade him farewell. He shook hands with us, and said mournfully, "I hope you kinds won't ever have to have your appendix out, but you will never realize what it is like until you do." He arrived home just in time to hear my father and mother planning to move into a smaller house without a spare bedroom.

Gooding

VILLAGE COURIER -- MARIA LOVED TO GOSSIP BUT UNCLE SAM DISAPPROVED

One would think that gossip would be slow to travel where there were no telephones, railways, or rapid means of communication.

Although news from the outside world, in Alberta's early days, was slow in coming in, gossip was one thing that did get around by various means in the community in which I lived, just as it does in any place where people come in contact in any way, no matter how isolated the district.

I heard a great deal about the evils of gossiping from a neighbor of ours whom everybody called "Uncle Sam", as he had taken that character part in the first masquerade ball they had in the district.

He should have been an authority on the subject for he was, more often than not, the object of the village gossip. That was not the only reason he disliked it; there was another stronger one. His wife, Maria, was noted for being a gossip, and for relaying the news around from house to house. We called her the "Village Courier".

I was very fond of "Uncle Sam" and spent many hours in his work shop where he tinkered a ound mending harness, machinery, or shoeing the mules and horses at the end of the shop that was fitted up with forge and anvil. I sorted the nails and kept the nail box tidy, and swept up the shavings when he was planing boards.

Uncle Sam was no church member, although he donated generously and preached many a sermon in that little shop with the anvil for a pulpit and myself for an audience. Whenever he started on a tirade

about the evils of gossiping he would hit the anvil with such force the sparks would fly in showers.

His white mules would be hitched to the democrat every so often, and Uncle Sam would head for the nearest town; and sometimes he would be gone for a week or more. Each day he was away I looked in to see if the forge was lit, and went away disappointed.

When he left the village everybody knew it, and said, "There goes 'Old Sam' off on another spree". And when he came home they knew it, too, for he always came driving over the hill singing, "Turah Mah Lurah Mah Lurah Mah Lay, Turah Mah Lurah Mah Landy, Every little twig and bush is covered with sugar and candy."

Maria would go around like a martyr for a few days, weeping occasionally if she thought Sam was looking; and some of the ladies would call on her and offer their sympathy and see just how things were going. Uncle Sam was very much annoyed at this, and he was particularly hard on the anvil at these times.

His wife was one of the most curious women I ever knew. She would get up at 4 o'clock in the morning to get her washing on the line, so she could hike across the fields to the neighbors to see if the batch of bread dough mixed the night before had risen properly; and if it hadn' t she wouldn't be long giving a report out that "Mrs Jones sure had a failure on her last batch of bread."

When Uncle Sam saw her streaking across the fields he would say, "Now there goes that woman again. Her unhealthy curiosity will sure land her into trouble yet. Whatever makes a woman want to know what her neighbor is doing and then run and tell it, is more than I

can understand."

Then he hit the anvil with such a bang that the mule pricked up his ears, backed out and headed for the barn with only three shoes on.

One day when Uncle Sam was especially exasperated by Maria's gossiping, he said, "That's what comes of getting a woman out of the newspapers."

I asked him if he got Maria out of the newspapers, and he said, "Yes, confound it!"

He repented as soon as he had said it, and asked me not to repeat it. I was too young to understand just what it meant; and was very puzzled for a long time as to just how he had managed it, until it dawned on me that he had advertised in the papers and that Maria was a mail order bride.

I was invited for dinner some times and after the meal Uncle Sam would light his old clay pipe, go out to the shop and leave me at the mercy of Maria and her questions.

She wanted to know how much my mother had paid for the material in her new dress, how many chicks we had got out of the last incubator batch, if we intended to purchase the quarter section we had leased for pasture, and many other things.

I guess I told her about everything. When my mother found out where the information was leaking out as to the family affairs, I had to decline all further invitations.

They sold out their property in Alberta one day and retired to California to spend their remaining days, and I had the pleasure

once of visiting them there for a little while. I found Uncle Sam with a huge spray in his hand spraying the lemon tree near the house with some solution to kill insects. He wanted to know all about Alberta, the crops, and everything in general; and then he said, "Go in and see Maria. She is crippled and pining away in that wheel chair."

I spent the time between trains telling her all the gossip and everything she wanted to know. She picked up a pair of binoculars I had laid on a nearby table, and got such pleasure out of them as she turned them toward the window and down the highway she almost forgot my presence.

Said she, "Samuel, I do believe the Benson's have a brand new car."

I left them with her and hurried away as I heard the whistle of the Southern Pacific in the distance.

Gooding

WOMEN DON'T KNOW HOW TO TREAT A FIRE

Supposing our prehistoric ancestors, with their flint and steel method of kindling a fire, had been privileged, like Mother Shipton, to take a peek down through the centuries and could have foreseen the strange things that men would be doing in 1942? They would have been somewhat disgusted with their flint and steel when they saw with what ease we obtain our light and heat today, and the way we protect ourselves from the elements.

They would likely have called us softies in prehistoric language, and been moved to carve a few jingles on the stones for future generations to read such as:

> And in the year nineteen hundred and forty two,
> Amazing things will the people do.
> Strange power will flow through copper wires
> That will bring forth light and kindle fires.

While Alberta old timers didn't have to resort to flint and steel, their sustem was also a little primitive compared to the present-day system, even in the smallest villages, of lighting and heating homes.

The only coal we saw was jutting forth from the banks of the river. The Indians had discovered it, and told us they knew where much "fire rock" was to be found. The government soon put a stop to this and told the Red Man that this was the King's coal and he mustn't take it. Instructions to the white man were different, but he understood, like the Red Man, that he could have all the wood he wanted but no coal.

One day the mounted policeman rode out onto the reserve, looking for a stolen critter. He was greeted and dismissed by the old chief who came to meet him, before he had a chance to state his mission. The

chief said very solemnly, "Indian no take King's coal. Indian no take anything. Good-bye." Then he went in and banged the door.

We had many different varieties of wood to pick and choose from on the forest slopes. Thanks to Mr. Eddy, we had matches, but seldom ever any paper. We started our fires with what we called fire dusters, made by whittling a dry stick downward until it was a mass of feathery wood curls somewhat resembling a feather duster. We salvaged every bit of pitch we found at wood-chopping time in the autumn, and this, with lots of chips and dry and green sticks, was our equipment for fire building.

Chips were a very important item in those days; the lady of the house was forever demanding, "Just a few chips to brown off this batch of bread," or just a few chips to bake a layer cake or boil the kettle.

Toby was our official chip man. He was about as broad as he was long and he grumbled and mumbled as he trudged down the path to the wood-pile, pulling the chip box along on a rough skid he had made for the purpose.

He used the old chopping block for a soap box, when he aired his views on the chip situation. He would say, "Women are terrible. All they do is yap for chips morning, noon and night." Toby was more concerned with keeping his stomach full than he was with keeping the chip box filled.

Sometime father aired his views also about women building fires. He said, "Women folks build a fire, then deliberately stand and poke it through the grate until there are only a few embers left in the soggy mass. Then they get down in front of the grate and blow vigorously,

and when this fails they reach for the kerosene can and run the risk of burning the house down."

After all these derogatory remarks on the female sex, I crawled out of bed on many a cold morning just to show him that I could build a fire. I looked like an Eskimo emerging from his igloo when I came out of th bedroom with stocking cap pulled well down over my ears, overshoes, a coat and mittens. Our bedrooms were never heated, and Jack Frost kept the windows beautifully coated with forest scenes and frosty folliage between chinooks.

I heaved a sigh of relief when a red spot appeared on the iron lid, and hoisted the big iron kettle with the water for the morning porridge over the hot spot. As lazy as Toby was, he was always the first one out in the morning.

He scrubbed himself vigorously, parted his hair on a crooked slant, and tied a big white tea towel around his middle. Then he carried the big wooden tray with the yellow bowls to the kitchen, where he stood brooding over them like a hen over a new batch of chickens, as the steaming porridge was ladled into the bowls for the return trip to the living room. Toby placed a lump of brown sugar in the top of each bowl, being careful to measure himself a good big one, and poured the cream from the big quart jug.

Sometimes, when we had finished our breakfast and were getting ready for school, Mother would look out of the window and say, "There is a white towel hanging from the window of the teacher's cabin, and I think she is having trouble with getting her fire started. You children better take a couple of fire sticks and some chips and see what you can do, or she will freeze to death."

By this time, Toby would be sitting on the chip box refusing to give us any. He launched into another tirade on women and chips. He said, "When I am in school, she calls me numbskull and pudding head, and then when she wants chips, she hangs out a dish towel for help, and calls me Chubby Dear."